

Post-con blues!

After all the fun... How to
return to the real world!



**GAMING
THE
MIND**



Gaming the Mind is a UK-based mental health charity (no. 1186983) run by mental health experts. Our aim is to improve mental health within the games community by increasing awareness and fighting stigma.

We're online at: www.gamingthemind.org

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Younger readers should read this booklet along with a parent, guardian, or trusted adult.

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Attending a fan convention can be fun, but do you feel low when it's all over? Perhaps you think...

I enjoyed myself so much! But I feel miserable going back to boring daily life!

I made such great friends at the convention! But nobody in my daily life understands me the same way... I feel so empty...



At the end of a fan convention, have you ever thought...

- * Going back to daily life is so dull and lifeless!
- * I keep thinking of how exciting the convention was...
- * I feel so much lonelier in my daily life...
- * Nothing feels as satisfying as the convention was...

It's normal for anyone to feel deflated after an exciting or stimulating experience is over. Feeling low in mood, unfulfilled, or exhausted after a fan convention can be part of a **normal** reaction that people call the **post-con blues**.

A lot of people experience the post-con blues. It isn't an illness, but it's still no fun to go through, so it's important to talk about. The post-con blues can also be a sign that something is missing, or needs changing, in our daily lives, so it's a good chance to reflect on that.

This leaflet can help you understand what post-con blues is, why it might happen, and some ways of dealing with it.

Because some people may also be experiencing mental health problems, this leaflet will indicate when you should seek further help, and we've referenced additional resources that you may find helpful.

What are post-con blues?

Imagine you've been to a busy fan convention, where you met loads of friends, had boatloads of fun, and felt really happy. Then you return home, to normal life...

How do you feel when you get back home?



Post-con blues is the “crashing” feeling when you go from high-excitement back to normal routine. You may feel:

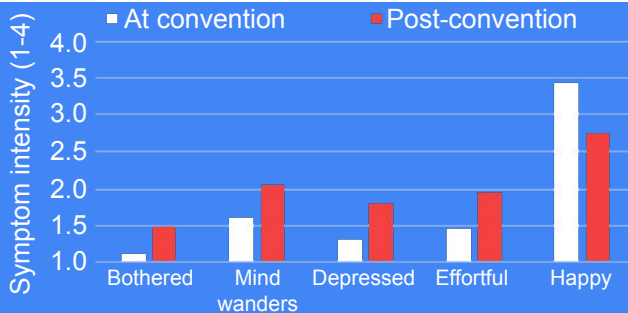
- sad that you have to go back to school or work
- empty, unfulfilled, or not know what to do with yourself
- lonely, or isolated
- that the people around you don't understand you well
- bored, or that the world around you is dull
- physically or mentally tired
- low in energy, or focus, to do things you normally do

This **shouldn't** last longer than a few days, and **shouldn't** cause major problems at school, work, or in your social life.

Are post-con blues real?!

There is very little research on post-con blues. Still, it's common to feel the blues after any big event, and it's important to take seriously.

One survey of convention attendees found that they reported worse psychological wellbeing up to seven days after the event, compared to during the event itself:



Source: *FurScience! A Summary of Five Years of Research from the International Anthropomorphic Research Project* by Courtney N. Plante et al (2016)

It's the most relevant evidence we've seen, but sadly lacking in important details. So all we can say is that it indicates a need for more research!

In one study*, anime fans surveyed at a convention reported higher psychological wellbeing compared to anime fans surveyed on the internet. So it might be that attending a convention *increases* your wellbeing, but then returning home brings you back to your *baseline* wellbeing, which may feel bad, but doesn't necessarily mean you're any worse off than normal. We simply don't know, yet!

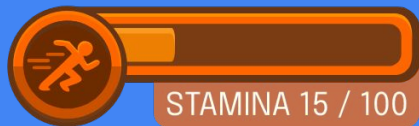
*Source: *You had to be there: Convention attendance and well-being in anime fans* by Adam Ray et al (2017)

One study* asked people who had attended a convention how they felt about returning home. Here's what they said:

Some felt **better** after the convention, describing an "emotional high" that persisted on returning home. They were able to reflect on happy memories, and felt more connected to the fandom and community.

Far more people reported **negative feelings**. They found it hard returning to a "mundane life", felt stressed being back at home and at work, and reported "social exhaustion". They felt a contrast between the positive people they met at the convention and the "bad-tempered" people in real life. Some felt "trapped" in their regular lives, as the people around them were intolerant of them, or abusive.

Returning home made some more aware of how lonely they felt, compared to being among the fan community. Some felt they had to wear a "social mask" in their day-to-day lives, whereas at the convention they felt free to be themselves. Respondents described the "painful" feeling of knowing they might not see some friends from the convention again. And some described the "depressing" feeling that their time at the convention had passed by too fast.



Some described a "dip in spirits", or lack of energy, and used terms like "slump" or "crash" to describe it.

*Source: The highs, the lows, and post-con depression: A qualitative examination of furies' return home following an anthropomorphic convention by Courtney N. Plante et al (2017)

There's practically no research on what could cause post-con blues! Still, there's some ideas...

Loneliness - A fan convention may give someone a taste of a community they truly feel they belong to, and having to say goodbye to it can be tough.

Hiding your identity - people can be themselves in a fan community, but may have to act differently back home, in order to fit in. It can be distressing to feel people don't understand the real you.



Mental exhaustion - a few days of intense socialising, fun activities, and sensory overload may make you feel drained, and you may not want to do anything for a while.

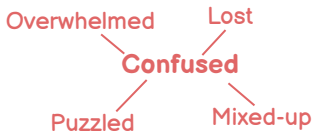
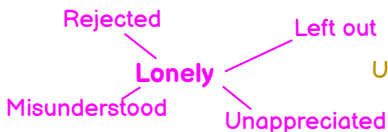
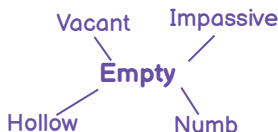
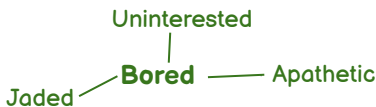
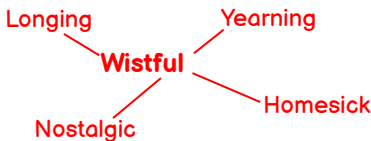
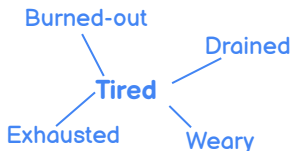
Boredom - the excitement of a fan convention can highlight how mundane the real world is, by comparison. This is something you may not typically notice, until you return from somewhere exciting and see the difference.

Social circumstances - how you feel about returning to the real world depends on the type of world you're returning to. It can be a harder crash back to reality if you deal with high stress in your day-to-day life.

Physical health - your mind and body are linked, and if your body is worn out, your mind won't be at peak condition!

Adrenaline dip - excitement increases hormones that pump us up, such as adrenaline. Some experts suspect that we can experience a drop in mood as these hormones come back to normal levels - but more research is needed.

How do you feel after a convention? Putting a name to your feelings can help you understand them. Circle the ones you experience...



Why do I feel this way?

Sometimes it's hard to understand what is making us feel bad until we stop and think about it. Try keeping a mood diary to see what's causing these feelings.

Time	Feeling	What happened	What I was thinking
<i>Monday, 8:30am</i>	<i>Tired, unfulfilled</i>	<i>Getting ready for work</i>	<i>"I don't want to go back to my boring job! It doesn't excite me, plus I'm so worn-out..."</i>
<i>Monday, 5:00pm</i>	<i>Lonely, wistful</i>	<i>Work colleagues invited me to go out tonight</i>	<i>"I like my colleagues, but I wish they enjoyed the things I enjoy... I wish I was back with my new friends..."</i>

...and so on. Make a regular routine of doing a mood diary to see what makes your mind tick!

You can also include columns to track how intense the feelings were, or what you did to feel better (and if it actually helped or not!)

Improve mental wellbeing!

Remember, post-con blues will eventually get better, but these tips might help you bounce back to fighting form!



1. Connect with others.

Share emotional support with others. Have conversations during online games. Join clubs or Discord groups based on your interests!

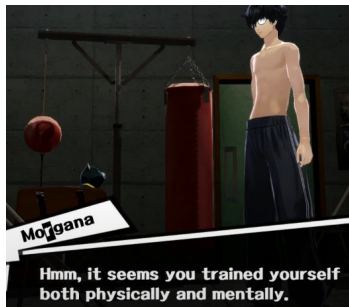
Pictured: in Persona 5, deepening your bonds increases your power!

2. Help others. Makes you feel useful. Run an errand, or try volunteering in an area that you care about!

3. Be physically active.

Improves physical health, but can also boost your mood and your self-esteem!

Pictured: in Persona 5, exercise increases both your HP and your SP!



4. Learn new skills. Boosts your confidence. Practice a new recipe for cooking, or try a DIY project.

5. Practice mindfulness. Take some time to understand yourself, your thoughts, your feelings, and the world around you. Find out how to do this on the next page!

Find out more about these tips at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>

Focus on the present by paying attention to your thoughts, sensations, and feelings. A breathing exercise is a good way to do this. Plus it can help you when feeling anxious! It's okay to stop this exercise if it ever makes you feel uncomfortable.

1. Sit comfortably. Rest both feet on the ground. Untense your muscles and relax your body. Close your eyes.
2. Feel the air entering and leaving your body as you breathe naturally.
3. Notice **sensations** across your body, from the feeling of your feet resting on the floor, to any itchy feelings on the top of your head.



Pictured: In Persona 5, Joker calmly notices itchy bodily sensations while meditating!



4. Notice the **thoughts** and **feelings** in your mind. Accept them without judgement and don't try to change them or dwell on them. If you feel too distracted or overwhelmed, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.
5. Notice **sensations** from the world around you, which you normally might ignore. Can you feel a breeze? Can you hear any background noises?
6. After around 3 minutes, finish the exercise with a deep breath in and out, and open your eyes.

See the last page for a link to a video-guided exercise!

Tips for convention-goers

There's some evidence that the wellbeing benefits of a vacation persist for longer if you found it relaxing and pleasurable. Whether or not this applies to attending a convention, it seems like good advice: **relax and have fun!**

Tips for a fun, stress-free convention experience:

1. Have realistic goals (don't try to do everything!)
2. Pack all your necessities
3. Try a relaxation technique if you're stressed (page 12)
4. Go with people you trust
5. Stay physically healthy (pages 16 & 17)
6. Keep a steady schedule to avoid rushing at the end

Back home, try to do things that help you to maintain your wellbeing, keep occupied, and stay connected:

1. Arrange a "debrief" chat with your friends from the convention. This provides closure and lets you share your memories in a positive way.
2. Catch up on lost sleep, and eat good nutritious meals.
3. Enjoy your souvenirs from the convention, and post your photos on social media, to extend the experience!
4. Build a routine to keep yourself busy, so you don't have a sudden crash in activity levels. Include work, exercise, learning, socialising, mindfulness, recreation, and rest.
5. Reach out to friends and family. Plan activities together that you can look forward to!
6. Have some alone time! Everyone enjoys time alone, so it's good to get into the mindset that it's okay to fly solo.

Managing loneliness

Loneliness is an emotion related to feeling isolated. It's not the same as being alone, as you can be alone without feeling lonely, and you can feel lonely even with people around you. Loneliness comes and goes for most people, but if it negatively impacts your life, these tips might help. Children must first consult a parent or guardian.

Online communities - join a group that shares your interests, e.g. on Discord.

Low pressure socialising - it can be comforting to hang out in a busy place where there's no pressure to engage with people. Try sitting in a cosy café, or lurking in Twitch chat!



New avenues for meeting people - meet like-minded people by joining a club or class that interests you.

Pictured: consider joining a gaming club!

Tell people how you feel - if you don't feel understood by friends and family, try talking to them, if you feel able to. Try sharing your interests with friends.

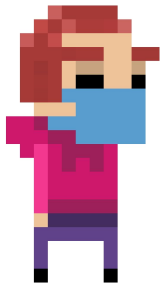
Don't compare yourself to others - what you see on social media is usually only what people want you to see.

Support services are available for talking, or peer support. See the last page for useful links and numbers!

Don't use drugs or alcohol to cope! If you're worried about this, there are support links on the last page.

The term “**con crud**” was coined to describe when people feel physically unwell after attending a fan convention, which can be due to catching a bug, such as a virus. Shield yourself from infection to protect your physical health and keep your mental wellbeing in top shape!

At the largest gatherings, respiratory infections are the leading cause of infectious disease. Whether it's the common cold, the flu, or COVID, wearing a face mask helps protect you and others! Be sure to cover your face if you cough or sneeze, and to wash your hands afterwards. It's a good idea to take a COVID rapid test before and after the convention, and stay at home if you test positive.



Gastrointestinal infections also spread in large gatherings. You don't want an upset stomach, diarrhoea, or to be vomiting! We can keep each other safe by observing proper hygiene. You mainly want to avoid hand-to-mouth transmission, so avoid touching your face! Be sure to wash your hands with soap after using the bathroom and before eating. Being in a large gathering means touching surfaces that many people have touched, so bringing your own hand sanitiser is a good idea!

If you feel physically unwell when you get home, be sure to seek medical attention as appropriate. You can always call NHS 111 for advice if you're not sure what to do. Aside from that, make sure to get plenty of rest, stay hydrated, and don't go into work or school sick!

Here's some more tips to take care of your body at the convention. Healthy body, healthy mind!



Fast food can give you an energy spike, but it's followed by an energy crash, causing you to feel tired and sluggish. Try to eat foods with a more sustained energy release, like certain fruits, vegetables, pulses, and wholegrain foods.

For a healthy snack, make and bring your own trail mix, using granola, nuts, seeds and dried fruit!

Drinks will be expensive, so pack water, which is the healthiest way to stay hydrated! Be cautious with drinks containing caffeine, such as energy drinks. Sure, caffeine can give you energy and make you feel alert, but it can also make you feel anxious and depressed, and can disturb your sleep.



Don't skimp on sleep! Adults need, on average, 7-9 hours of sleep a night. Children need even more: 9-13 hours!

You'll be walking a lot, so make sure you take rest breaks to avoid exhaustion. And wear comfortable footwear!

If you take medications, it can be hard to remember your doses when you're swept up in all the hustle and bustle. Set alarms to remind you of your doses.

Alcohol can lead to hangovers and can lower your mood. Be aware that drugs and alcohol can be harmful to your physical and mental health. See the last page for links to resources on drugs and alcohol.

The post-con blues should eventually fade away, and shouldn't interfere with your life. So what happens if things feel worse, and last much longer?

Depression, a clinical illness, is more than just feeling down for a few days. It is when you feel persistently down, over a course of weeks, or even longer.

Depression affects everyone differently. You might feel persistently unhappy; you might lose interest in things you used to enjoy; and you might feel low in energy and easily get tired.

You may also experience physical symptoms, such as loss of appetite, or disturbed sleep.

Depression can make you feel hopeless about the future. At its worst, depression can make you feel like life isn't worth living.

If you or someone close to you is concerned that you have depression, or if you have any other mental health concerns, make an appointment to see your doctor.

Depression can make some people try to end their own lives. If you feel you might try to end your own life, or hurt yourself, seek emergency medical treatment, right away.

Find more information on depression from the NHS at:
<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/clinical-depression/>

Always speak to a medical professional if you have concerns about your mental or physical health. If you have concerns regarding your immediate safety, please seek emergency medical attention.

FRANK

Don't use drugs or alcohol to cope. Talk to FRANK for more info:
www.talktofrank.com

Mind - peer support

Peer support brings people together to support each other.
www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/peer-support/about-peer-support/

Guided mindfulness breathing exercise from the Recovery College
<https://www.swlstg.nhs.uk/about-our-courses/e-learning/video/147-mindful-breathing>

Samaritans

Whatever you're going through, Samaritans are here to listen.
www.samaritans.org
Call 116 123 for free (open at all times)

Childline

For under-19's, a free, private and confidential service where you can talk about anything.
www.childline.org.uk
Call 0800 1111 for free (open at all times)

Abuse / domestic violence concerns:

- Women can call **The Freephone National Domestic Abuse Helpline**, run by **Refuge** on 0808 2000 247
- Men can call **Men's Advice Line** on 0808 8010 327
- **LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline** by **galop** - 0800 999 5428
- Under 19's can call **Childline** (see above)

We have more resources listed at:
www.gamingthemind.org/findhelp

